

Medicare's discount card is no puzzle

Enough already! It's time to stop the senseless and increasingly partisan campaign to convince senior citizens that the new Medicare Prescription Discount Card program is too complicated and confusing for them to understand. Besides being wrong, this campaign is insulting to seniors, who are more than capable of making this fairly straightforward decision.

The fact is, selecting a Medicare discount drug card is no more confusing, and probably less so, than a host of other purchases seniors make routinely. And if they do have problems there is a consumer information assistance system available to help them make the right choice about the cards offered to them.

All seniors have to do is pick up the phone, dial 1-800-MEDICARE, list the drugs they take each month, and ask which card will give them the overall best price at the local pharmacy.

How much easier could it be? Wouldn't it be wonderful if we had a similar system to buy our groceries, appliances, cars, insurance, or just about anything else?

Still, the drumbeat is relentless, with *The Republic* a contributor. Check out these two headlines from recent stories on the drug card program:

■ "Options for drug coverage overwhelm seniors" (April 27).

■ "Medicare drug details unveiled, still puzzling" (April 30).

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My Turn



Partisan efforts to discredit the program are an insult to the seniors who need it.

Political critics have been even worse. In an effort to wrest partisan advantage by derailing a program aimed at helping seniors before it even begins, the national Democratic committees have sent deceptive "talking points" advising Democrat candidates to label the discount card program "complicated" and "confusing."

Arizona Gov. Janet Napolitano echoed the party line in her May 5 e-mail "Message of the Week," in which she describes the Medicare drug card program as "daunting" and "incredibly confusing" and suggests seniors reject it in favor of the CopperRx card she sponsored, calling it a "simpler alternative."

But seniors need to pick the card that's right for them, not the one that's right for the governor. They should know that for the prescription drugs they use most (Lipitor, Norvasc, Fosamax, Plavix, Prilosec and Celebrex), they can do better than the CopperRx card.

Further, low-income seniors should understand that if they choose the CopperRx card they will not get the \$600 annual grant toward the purchase of discounted drugs offered by every Medicare card, a steep price to pay for choosing the governor's "simpler alternative."

Maybe the most curious criticism leveled against the Medicare card program is that it is "temporary" because it expires in 2006. But the expiration of the card program is a good thing because it will be replaced by a comprehensive insurance benefit for seniors that will offer savings far beyond any card.

In the meantime, this is what seniors can expect from the discount drug card program:

■ 10-17 percent discounts on name-brand drugs and 30-60 percent discounts on generics.

■ Extra help for seniors who need it most, including a \$600 annual grant for drug purchases.

■ A comprehensive source of consumer information that is accessible by phone or via the Internet.

The Democrats' effort to derail the Medicare drug card program rests on the mistaken notion that members of the "Greatest Generation" — which won WWII and the Cold War, put a man on the moon, won the battle for civil rights and built an economy that is second to none — are somehow too dull to choose the discount drug card that best serves their needs. It's absurd.

Rather than trying to scare seniors away from the program, responsible officials will be encouraging them to learn all they can about this opportunity.

I'm betting that seniors, once informed, will have no problem making the decision that is right for them.

The writer, a Republican, is an Arizona congressman.